

Imprisoned in Sundown Towns: The Racial Politics of My Domestic Exile (2021)

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Power Reacts to All Threats

On July 12, 2021 I was transferred from the Indiana prison system to the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Corrections (sic!). This was my *sixth* interstate prison system transfer in nine years. For a state prisoner, which I am, that's unheard of.

Power reacts to all threats. Most of the many people I work with recognize these transfers to be official reactions to my political work.

A major component of my work has been against racism and its central role as a counterrevolutionary tool and weapon of the capitalist imperialist system, used to polarize the oppressed masses and pit them against each other.

As comrade Fred Hampton Sr. of the original Black Panther Party (BPP) said, you don't fight fire with fire, you put fire out with water, and likewise, you don't fight racism with racism, you fight racism with solidarity. The correctness of this political line is proven by the fact that the government's consistent response to struggles for genuine solidarity across racial lines is to incite and play up racial divisions.

In fact it was the U.S. government that always tried to falsely portray the BPP

as an anti-white group.

Similarly, in 2009 I was profiled in a book-length report by the Virginia State Police's "Fusion Center," in collaboration with the Feds, as a "Domestic Terrorist Threat." The reasons given were that I proved effective at exposing the abuses of the U.S. prison system to the public and mobilizing their protests against those conditions, and that I sought to revive the work of the BPP. Emphasis was put on the fact that in my work I promoted a philosophy of "the brotherhood of the oppressed." Readers should take special note that I was deemed a "terrorist threat" **not** because of promoting division, but rather for promoting **unity**.

The government targeted Fred Hampton on the same basis, and its **reaction** to the threat he presented in his unrivaled effectiveness at organizing and uniting with oppressed whites, was to drug and murder him in his sleep.

The reaction to my perceived threat in advancing the same line and platform, has been to not just repeatedly interstate transfer me, but to place me each time in prisons and prison systems notorious for racist staff, many located in "Sundown Towns." The pattern and tactic are undeniable.

It's important that readers grasp from this discussion that racism is and always has been manufactured and manipulated by the establishment (the ruling class and government) as a counterrevolutionary strategy to divide and control the people.

The Politics of Racism

The state serves and protects the interests of the ruling class. As V.I. Lenin correctly observed in "The State and Revolution," the foundation of state power is the military, police and, of course, prisons. So, anyone representing a bonafide threat to the capitalist imperialist ruling class and their system of control, can expect to meet resistance from its armed protectors. It's simply a natural mechanism of self-preservation, and is why every genuine

revolutionary recognizes that s/he lives every moment in the crosshairs of the reactionary state.

But as Fred Hampton, Kwame Nkrumah, and so many other revolutionary scientists pointed out, capitalism and racism go hand and hand. So, what should those who challenge the system on both fronts expect but a racist response? Which is exactly what I've received.

Before looking at the specifics of my situation, it's important that the reader see from an historical and political standpoint that racism was an ***invention*** of the ruling class and its state, and is used deliberately to maintain control of the masses.

Racial classifications and racism are not and have never been innate. People do not "naturally" polarize and view or treat each other antagonistically because of differences in skin color, hair and body type, etc.

Race is ***manufactured*** and used (manipulated) by a very specific group of people for a very specific purpose. That group of people is the minority ruling class, who first invented and refined the method during the colonial era. Its purpose was to polarize the masses of oppressed people against each other, because when and if they were allowed to unite they'd easily recognize the ruling minority of the wealthy as the source of everyone else's inequality and insecurity, and their natural impulse would be to revolt against this numerically inferior minority that lives in luxury through exploiting everyone else!

The early colonial system was plagued by such revolts. In this regard, the ruling class had to use one sector of the oppressed masses to police and contain other sectors, which they could not effectively do themselves, again because of their small numbers. This method of racialized social control began in the English North American colonies in the late 17th Century, and spread throughout the colonial world.

In early colonial North Amerika, people were not categorized by race. In fact, as

Theodore Allen explained in Volume 2 of his extensively documented study, *The Invention of the White Race*, in the laws of that social system, there were no classifications of people by race. The slaves and indentured servants who were exploited for their labor by the colonial ruling class were composed of Afrikans, Europeans and AmerIndians. These laborers united by a common condition of oppression found common cause in united rebellions. United revolts were a common feature of the system of forced servitude all across the Western hemisphere.

In the English North American colonies it came to a head in 1676. A young planter, Nathaniel Bacon, in a quest to expand the colonial territory into surrounding AmerIndian lands against the opposition of the Virginian governor William Berkeley, who wanted to maintain trade relations with the surrounding First Nations, incited the Afrikan and European laborers to revolt against the Virginia government, promising freedom and land.

This revolt, known as Bacon's Rebellion, which began as a genocidal campaign against AmerIndians, ended as a united slave revolt that overthrew the Virginia colonial government, burned down the capitol at Jamestown, and sent governor Berkeley into exile.

Six months into the revolt Bacon died of influenza, and, deprived of its leadership, the revolt was put down by treachery, but with a band of Afrikans holding out until the last.

With the colonial government reinstated, there began the process of devising a system of social control that would prevent the recurrence of such a devastating uprising. This was when and why the racialization of society and the cultivation of racial chauvinism began.

In 1682 the colonial government began passing laws that divided the population according to race—white and "Negro"—and phasing out servitude and enslavement of "whites," with slavery made an exclusive hereditary and permanent status for "Negroes."

To solidify the racial line, in 1705 the hypo-descent rule was created, which declared anyone with "a single drop" of African blood to be "Negro." This way the multitudes of "mixed bloods" produced by the systematic sexual abuse of slave girls and women by "white" males (which was one of the "privileges" of whiteness), would not inherit the "privilege" of being "white" from the fathers.

Another privilege of "whiteness" was the entitlement to own property, which slaves could not do as they were deemed property, or chattel, themselves. This is why slaves were forbidden to marry. The basis of marriage, rooted in feudalism, was to restrict the sexual freedom of women to allow the inheritance of property to be traceable and to pass through the male line. Deprived of marriage, slave society was matriarchal, and lineage passed through the mother, with one's slave (chattel) status "inherited" from the mother.

The poor whites, most of whom were dirt farmers that lived worse than the slaves, were taught by the cultural institutions of the ruling class to believe that having "white" skin like the planter ruling class, made them superior to the "Negro." So, many took a sort of perverse pleasure and sense of social compensation in degrading, lording their "skin" over, and abusing Blacks (physically, sexually, verbally, and so on.)

The decisive move for consolidating the system of racial rule and terror came in the early 1700s when poor whites were conscripted into what became the plantation system's police force—the slave patrols—which politically armed and empowered them to police and brutalize the entire Black population, to keep them "in order" and suppress potential slave revolts, which the ruling class kept the entire "white" society in constant paranoid fear of.

The white population thus "contained" Blacks through racial terror and kept them under siege as they were indoctrinated by the ruling class to live in perpetual fear of slave uprisings, portrayed as "Negroes with guns" who were forever plotting to kill all whites. This fear of the "enemy within" plotting a race war, induced white society to remain armed to the teeth while fearing Black

communities arming themselves.

Socialization to Racist Terror

These same trends and fears persist and are used today in policing and imprisonment (essentially the ongoing “containment”) of Black communities in Amerika.

In fact, the **conditioned** Black community fear of slave patrol violence **is exactly the same in relation to police today**. Black parents are still compelled to give their children “The Talk” on how to conduct themselves when confronted by police in hopes of saving their lives just as in the days of the slave patrols: the children are instructed to be passive, overly polite, deferential, to show no aggression or assertiveness, abandon all pride and dignity, expect and accept whatever abuse is meted out (physical and verbal) but do nothing to “provoke” them to escalate the abuse such as defending oneself or demanding respect, and so on. It’s the same socialization to racist terror, in a society that has never confronted its racist past, its continued racist practices, and the **true** origin and source of racism. Because to do so would be to expose the greatest tool of social control used by the wealthy ruling elite to divide and rule everyone else.

It is to avoid this exposure that all manner of theories about racism being innate are tossed around by elites whenever some outrageous act of racism compels the masses to talk about solving the evils of racism.

The source of racism and racist terror isn’t hard to find. It is a social condition manufactured by the ruling class and political system, and armed by the capitalist state. Which brings me back to my own experiences.

White Power Against Disempowered Blacks

It’s by design that the bulk of policing forces in communities of color consist of whites who come from other communities (just like the poor whites who made

up the slave patrols and hired out as overseers on the slave plantations), and that the vast majority of high security prisons with the harshest conditions are located in segregated rural white communities, most of which are steeped in racist culture and stereotyped views of people of color. Again, it is the exact same state-created and enforced use of armed whites to contain disempowered Blacks.

It's been very deliberate that every prison that I've been interstate transferred to, has been based in just such segregated rural white communities, most having particular notoriety for racism, and the prisoners live under conditions of racial terror at the hands of the guards; just a continuation of the racial terror they experienced in their communities at the hands of police before their capture and confinement **by** the police.

Let's begin with the fact that I was confined from 1998 until I was first transferred out of state in 2012, to the notoriously racist Red Onion State Prison and Wallens Ridge State Prison, two sister supermax prisons located a few miles apart in the mountains of rural, white segregated Southwestern Virginia.

These two prisons, built in 1998 and 1999 respectively, developed instant nationwide notoriety upon opening for racist abuse of their predominantly Black prisoner populations.

The inhumane abuses and tasteless racism at Red Onion State Prison was put on national display within a year of its opening by Human Rights Watch, which independently investigated conditions at Red Onion and published its findings in a 1999 report that can be read on its website, titled *Red Onion State Prison: Supermaximum Security Confinement in Virginia*.

I was one of the many prisoners who appealed to Human Rights Watch to investigate Red Onion. In the years that followed I helped bring more public exposure and resistance to the abuses at Red Onion and Wallens Ridge, which is what led to my first interstate transfer.

My first transfer in 2012 was to Oregon – the one state in the U.S. that expelled all Black people and consequently still has only a tiny Black population. Oregon joined the “Union” as a literal Sundown **state**.

Immediately upon my confinement in the Oregon prison system, officials there attempted to incite violence between me and the numerous white supremacist prisoner groups there, by telling them I am a Black Panther which they falsely portrayed as an anti-white “group” that aspires to kill all white people and such nonsense—the same anti-white lies projected against enslaved Blacks, the BPP, etc. to keep Blacks and our organizing efforts under a perpetual state of racial siege fueled by manufactured paranoid white fear of Blacks and our organizations, and to keep the masses of Blacks and whites polarized and fearful of each other.

I wrote about my Oregon experience and the racial divide-and-conquer games the pigs tried to play, and how they failed.^[1]

My second interstate transfer (in 2013) was to Texas, which even the federal courts openly denounced for its extremely racist, corrupt and abusive prison system.^[2]

In fact it was Texas that simply merged the old plantation slave system with its prison system after the Civil War, and still today forces all of its prisoners to perform uncompensated slave labor in chain-gang type work squads (called “hoe squads”). These prisoners, who of course are disproportionately people of color, are forced to plant, tend and harvest huge crops of all manner of agriculture including cotton, using only hand-held hoes—hence the name “hoe squad” (plows, combines and other basic agricultural tools and modern technology are not allowed — the work is **meant** to be labor-intensive, slow and grueling). These work squads are closely patrolled by groups of armed guards on horseback, who are almost invariably white. To witness these squads at work is to witness a scene that looks like something from an old slave movie. Every Black prisoner whom I talked to about their experiences working these squads, was triggered and traumatized by the experience of

literally reliving historic slave conditions.

My third interstate transfer (in 2017) was to Florida, which is even more notorious than Texas for its abusive prisons and the blatant racism of their staff and administrators. Indeed, the scandal of prisoners being routinely beaten, tortured, and murdered by Florida guards, has been featured in the *Miami Herald*, which can be read online, especially since 2014. Based on my own observations and experiences in Florida, the *Miami Herald's* coverage barely scratched the surface. The corruption and abuse I witnessed in Florida was unlike anything I've witnessed anywhere else.

Even members of Florida's legislature admitted in the *Herald* that its prisons are run by card-carrying Klansmen. A culture of racist impunity permeates them, and one Black Florida legislator admitted she was terrified in the company of the white staff at a prison in Lake Butler, FL where I was confined, when she toured it in 2018, the same year I was in Florida.

After barely a year in Florida and in response to my own involvement in challenging and exposing the abuses in its prisons, Florida officials demanded that Virginia remove me from their custody, giving Virginia a five-day ultimatum.

Because of the immediate need to remove me from Florida, Virginia officials had to take me back temporarily until another racist state could be found to send me to.

While back in Virginia I was initially sent back to Red Onion and held in an empty cellblock, then moved to Virginia's Death Row (where only three prisoners were housed) in an effort to play petty psychology and to isolate me until my next move.

Several months later, in November 2018, I was interstate transferred to Indiana, a state that bears the historic distinction of having Amerika's largest concentration of Ku Klux Klan members in U.S. history. Fully half of some of its

branches of government and a third of its male population were Klansmen during the 1900s. A cultural and value system that has not changed at all. Indiana still boasts numerous sundown towns.

In fact, Wabash Valley Correctional Facility, the Indiana prison I was confined to just before my most recent transfer to Ohio, is located in Carlisle, Indiana, a sundown town that forcibly expelled its entire Black population after a thwarted lynching in 1904, and has kept Blacks out ever since.

Today, Carlisle maintains a 97% white population, with its Black population consisting of the men held in prison.

And now, my latest interstate transfer (on July 12, 2021) was to Ohio, where I'm currently confined in the Southern Ohio Correctional Facility, aka Lucasville prison, renowned for the April 1993 uprising against brutal conditions that resulted in a settlement fund to compensate prisoners for more abuses committed as a result of the protest.

The staff here at Lucasville is about as openly racist as it's possible to be. The hostility and lynch mob energy of many of the guards is visceral. They make racist jokes and comment openly as prisoners pass them during movement to recreation or the chow hall for example. They order the prisoners around like they're talking to cattle, and routinely use racist epithets, and curse them. And the horror stories don't stop.

All I've heard since I've been here is about prisoners being beaten, "found" hanging (lynchings by guards staged as suicides), starved, conditions in solitary confinement that reduce many to living in and throwing body waste, and much else.

The corrupt impunity and racist staff culture here reminds me of Red Onion and Wallens Ridge prisons in Virginia. Many of the guards here come from segregated rural white communities of West Virginia, communities like those local to the two Virginia super-maxes that draw their staff from rural West

Virginia and Kentucky.

At Lucasville the prisoners live in constant fear and expectation of violent abuse and arbitrary mistreatment. The same old systemic racist police terror.

The guards don't even pretend at being professional. It's like living in the antebellum South, where the guards project attitudes of violent, menacing entitlement to say and do as they please to the prisoners, and dare them to even seem displeased. Of course it all displeases me and I wear my displeasure openly.

In turn the guards here have instructed others in my cellblock to not talk or pass items to me, or they will have their cells ransacked under the guise of cell searches, they will be thrown in solitary, etc. Those seen talking to me are confronted by guards and given the third degree. I'm the "bad nigger" to be isolated and shunned, an embodiment of that evil Black insurgent that feeds white racist paranoia. This paranoia has often given vent to the most barbaric abuses carried out by entire white communities. Lucasville, like each prison I've been interstate transferred to, draws its staff from just such communities.

Since being here, I've been denied all my personal property, which I was forced to leave behind in Indiana. They're trying to solitarily confine me in General Population! I'm not expected to last long in GP anyway.

I've had both ranking guards and prisoners inform me what's in store **when** (not if) I'm sent to actual solitary, where my isolation will be complete. Many prisoners here tell me Lucasville has refined the practice of isolating (disappearing) prisoners and holding them incommunicado. Cutting them off from other prisoners by housing them long term in isolated cells in isolated cellblocks, and cutting off their access to the outside world by denying phone access, intercepting and destroying mail, etc.

State-Enforced Racism

Most people of color in Amerika experience the racist terror of the government through encounters with police, which are common but not constant. Inside U.S. jails and prisons, however, where prisoners live under total scrutiny and control of guards, the racist terror is constant. In **all** cases it is deliberate. It is a condition created and enforced by the state.

Remember that throughout U.S. history, the framework of racism was **always** set up and legalized **by the government**. In various states, the laws and courts adjusted themselves and their guidelines to accommodate the racist practices in their particular territories. The Supreme Court set the general framework for the entire country. These were landmark decisions. Let's start with the antebellum decision of *Dred Scott v. Sandford*, 60 U.S. 393 (1857), which held that Blacks are not Amerikan citizens nor people and have no rights that whites were bound to respect. Or how about *U.S. v. Cruikshank*, 92 U.S. 542 (1875), that gave lynch mobs protection from federal prosecution. There was *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896) that legalized Jim Crow ("separate but equal") segregation. Then came *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954) that overruled Jim Crow in words only, but only to limit the negative impact of racial segregation on diplomats of the newly liberated Afrikan nations visiting and living in Amerika, whom the State Department was trying to woo to gain preferential access to the vast natural resources in those Afrikan regions.

The reinstatement of open racist practices was set out under *Washington v. Davis*, 426 U.S. 229 (1976), by legalizing the "sneaky racism" popularized by Richard Nixon, of implementing racist practices and policies while disguising the actual racist motives. *Washington v. Davis* established that it was fine to practice racist abuse so long as one doesn't express a racist **motive**. This is still the prevailing standard of racism today. Actually, it is being used increasingly to revoke many of the "Civil Rights" and "Affirmative Action" reforms made during the era of *Brown v. Board of Education*, by claiming that since those reforms were made with the **motive** of benefiting a race of people, it violated the *Washington v. Davis* standard of disadvantaging a race of

people (in the case of those reforms, white people) and having a racial motive (to benefit Blacks and other people of color). So with this tack, the old practices of overt racism are increasingly rising to the surface in Amerika, led by conservative politicians.

Racism and racist terror are and always have been manufactured and legitimized by the system, perpetuated throughout society through their institutions of power, and serve the purpose of polarizing the masses and playing the oppressed against each other—to divide and divert everyone's attention away from the true exploiters and oppressors at the top who run the entire system.

I am a politically active, imprisoned communist Black man, who opposes and struggles against racist and capitalist exploitation and oppression. I have been profiled as a "terrorist threat" in turn, and transferred between six state prison systems in nine years, confined ***invariably*** to prisons and prison systems that have particular notoriety for racist conditions. The system not the people is at the root of creating, spreading, manipulating, exploiting and perpetuating racism. It is ***we the people*** who must eradicate this decadent capitalist system that feeds off and causes untold death, destruction, and conflicts among the people by playing up racial divisions and conflicts. Need the picture be made any clearer?

Dare to struggle,

Dare to win!

All Power to the People!

^[1] Kevin "Rashid" Johnson, "Political Struggle in the Teeth of Prison Reaction: From Virginia to Oregon" (2013), available at *rashidmod.com*

^[2] See the Ruiz v. Estelle and Ruiz v. Johnson series of rulings in the U.S. District Courts for Texas and the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals.